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Tennessee's Independent Living & Developmental Disabilities Networks

Joint Publication on Network Programs and Collaboration



Council on
Developmental Disabilities



A Message from Administration on Disabilities

A Message from Administration on Disabilities, Administration for Community Living, Health and Human Services

The Administration for Community Living was created in 2012 around the core conviction that older adults and people with disabilities should be able to live independently and participate fully in their communities. While the disability and aging communities may not see eye to eye on every single issue, it is increasingly clear that together we have a larger voice, more influence, and ultimately are more successful advocates.

This kind of collaboration isn't always easy. It can take energy, time, and patience. But it is crucial to making our communities stronger.

We have seen the benefits of collaboration up close, and this is what is needed in order to assure that all people, regardless of age or disability, live with dignity, make their own choices, and participate fully in society.

This is why we are appreciative of and excited by the work happening in Tennessee to forge a shared vision that the Developmental Disabilities and Independent Living Networks can achieve together.

In 2015, the Administration on Disabilities (AoD) was created, bringing together the Administration for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and the Independent Living Administration.

Shortly after this we received an invitation from the Executive Directors of the State Council on Developmental Disabilities and State Independent Living Council to come to Tennessee and help the DD and IL networks talk about and strategically plan how both could work on policy, systems change and other efforts collaboratively. We provided our vision and ideas on how the groups could work together on specific tasks. The networks identified youth transition as an issue that could greatly benefit from joint effort, and it has been wonderful to see that idea become action.

Just as leaders in Tennessee and Washington, DC are seeing the benefits of collaboration, so too are leaders in other states such as California, Massachusetts, Arkansas, Alabama, Missouri and Ohio. At ACL/AOD, we are helping share those stories to encourage other states to consider following a similar path.

Of course, collaboration doesn't mean losing the unique elements of our individual missions and histories. Rather, by engaging in dialogue we can better understand different perspectives and seek out opportunities to work in coalition in areas where we have common ground. And it allows for growth and continued development of deep and specific expertise that each of us brings to the table.

We look forward to seeing the impact of the work being done in Tennessee for people with disabilities and their families, and for the future of disability policy.

Tennessee has long been known as the Volunteer State and we thank you for volunteering to help set an example from which we can all learn and seek to emulate.



Bob Williams

Deputy Commissioner, Administration on Disabilities
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Dear Readers:

In September 2015, Tennessee agencies funded through the Developmental Disabilities Act and Tennessee's Independent Living programs funded through the Rehabilitation Act met to begin strategic coordination among our organizations. Having been recently relocated to a new federal Administration on Disabilities, our programs had an opportunity to increase our impact in Tennessee by joining forces to address common goals. Together we established a shared priority: improving youth transition outcomes through postsecondary education and job training that leads to competitive and integrated employment. Since that time, our two networks continue to meet together to work on details of joint projects, including this publication!

We hope you find this publication informative and that you learn something new about the programs across Tennessee funded under the Independent Living Administration and the Developmental Disabilities Act. Please reach out to us to find ways that you can become involved in our work. We are always interested in hearing from Tennesseans with disabilities about your experiences in getting supports and services you need.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wanda Willis".

Wanda Willis, Executive Director
Council on Developmental Disabilities

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ann Eubank".

Ann Eubank, Executive Director
Statewide Independent Living Council

Introduction:



DD and IL Network joint meeting, September 2015

On July 22, 2014, President Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), landmark federal legislation focused on improving the public workforce system and employment access for jobseekers, including those with disabilities. This legislation also brought together several federal disability programs located within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, including the Independent Living Administration programs and Developmental Disabilities Act programs, to create the new Administration on Disabilities.

The Independent Living programs are comprised of Centers for Independent Living and Statewide Independent Living Councils. In Tennessee there are six Centers for Independent Living (CILs), providing direct services to 35 counties and intake and referral services across the state. Additionally, Tennessee has a Statewide Independent Living Council, which provides support and technical assistance to Tennessee's CILs. The Developmental Disabilities Act programs include the Council on Developmental Disabilities, Disability

Rights Tennessee, the Boling Center on Developmental Disabilities at the University of Tennessee Memphis, and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. While these programs, now united under the Administration on Disabilities, have different missions, history, cultures and structures, they all share a common goal: to improve opportunities for people with disabilities to access quality services and supports, achieve economic self-sufficiency, and experience equality and inclusion in all facets of community life.

This publication provides an overview of the work of each agency in the Independent Living Network and Developmental Disabilities Network in Tennessee. We discuss how the partnership between these two networks will benefit Tennesseans with disabilities. After reading this publication you are encouraged to connect with these programs to support pursuing our shared goal of improving the lives of Tennesseans with disabilities.

Independent Living Network

Independent Living Philosophy, Movement, and Services

In the 1960s, the Independent Living (IL) movement, inspired by the civil rights movement in the United States, united people with disabilities to fight for equality and inclusion. Milestone successes for the IL movement include the passage of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, which established the Centers for Independent Living (CILs), and facilitating a country-wide focus on deinstitutionalization, or removing people with disabilities from institutions and nursing homes and integrating them back into their home communities.

Despite its roots in deinstitutionalization, the 'Independent living philosophy' that rose from this movement is not just about living in a specific place. Independent Living is a broader philosophy committed to ensuring people with disabilities lead autonomous, self-directed, and independent personal and professional lives. IL's emphasis on self-direction is rooted in the ideas that people with disabilities are the experts regarding their own needs, that their point of view has value, and that the locus of 'disability' are social barriers to inclusion, not an impairment itself. Therefore, in line with IL philosophy, CILs and the Statewide Independent Living Councils (SILC) strictly adhere to federal guidelines requiring at least 51% of the employees and boards of directors are people with disabilities. This guidance provides the structure to offer programs for people with disabilities by people with disabilities.

The IL philosophy can be seen in practice at CILs across the nation where IL specialists seek to empower people with disabilities to exert influence, choice, and control over all aspects of their lives. The CILs' IL Specialists work, often peer-to-peer, with individuals to create Independent Living Plans to become and remain independent. Then IL specialists support their consumers in navigating barriers to achieve their goals.

The services provided by the IL specialists to help consumers are as complex and unique as the people themselves. Specialists may provide information and referrals, so people know where to go and who to contact to meet their goal. Or specialists may provide skills training ranging from using adaptive equipment to managing finances, or, from cooking on a budget to hiring a personal assistant. For almost every consumer, training



Empower TN Independent Living specialist with transition-aged youth group attending Disability Day on the Hill

includes self-advocacy and systems advocacy skills, which support them in meeting their individual needs, as well as, shifting policies and practices that impact many people with disabilities. For adult consumers transitioning from nursing homes to community settings or youth transitioning to adulthood, postsecondary education, and employment, the specialists focus on skills necessary to navigate these uniquely complex passages.

Tennessee's Independent Living Network

Tennessee has six Centers for Independent Living across the state, located in Paris, Jackson, Memphis, Nashville, Knoxville, and Chattanooga.

- TARP, Inc. (Training, Advocacy, Referral and Peer Support) Center for Independent Living – Paris
- Jackson Center for Independent Living - Jackson
- Memphis Center for Independent Living - Memphis
- Empower Tennessee - Nashville
- disAbility Resource Center - Knoxville
- TRAC (Tri-State Resource and Advocacy Corp) – Chattanooga

All Centers work together under the umbrella of the Statewide Independent Living Council of Tennessee to promote and expand independent living programs and practices across the state, to advocate for state and federal policy change that improves the lives of individuals with disabilities, and to establish and collaborate on triennial goals committed to in the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL).



T.A.R.P. Independent Living Staff

Tennessee's Statewide Independent Living Council

Per the 1973 federal Rehabilitation Act, each state was directed to establish a Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC). Collaborating with the Centers and other private and public entities, the SILC promotes and expands independent living within the state, but does not provide direct services to individuals with disabilities. As the Centers provide programs "cross-disability" (meaning a person must only self-identify as a person with a disability to be eligible for CIL support), the SILC has the unique opportunity to support the CILs through systemic advocacy and statewide collaborations. SILC duties include: collaboration for statewide expansion of IL services; resource development; policy education and advocacy; facilitation of the SPIL development; and provision of technical support to CILs. The Council is composed of members appointed by the Governor who provide statewide representation, the majority of whom are individuals with disabilities.

TARP, Inc. Center for Independent Living

T.A.R.P., Inc. (Training, Advocacy, Referral and Peer Support) Center for Independent Living was established in 2005 in Paris, TN. T.A.R.P. was the first truly rural-based Center for Independent Living in Tennessee, serving eight counties in Northwest and North-Middle Tennessee including Benton, Dickson, Henry, Houston, Humphreys, Montgomery, Stewart and Weakley counties.

T.A.R.P.'s advocacy program promotes community



T.A.R.P. consumers working on social skills

awareness of the needs of individuals with disabilities and facilitates the expansion of opportunities to provide social and career opportunities that strengthen community-based living goals. Focusing on the unique nature of a rural community, T.A.R.P. meets their consumers where they are. They raise awareness and involvement by establishing relationships with nursing homes, schools, and vocational programs to underscore available services to support engaged and included, home and community-based living.

"TARP is excited to work with this coalition; we believe our consumer base would expand to better serve our community."

T.A.R.P.'s diverse programming touches on the needs of individuals with disabilities across the lifespan. In addition to providing the services of IL specialists, T.A.R.P. has gained recognition in the community for their exceptional Transition Services and Durable Medical Equipment Exchange Program.

The Durable Medical Equipment Exchange Program provides an alternative to nursing home admissions by connecting people in need with free durable medical equipment such as shower chairs and wheelchairs. This program directly affects accessibility while preserving people's dignity.

The Youth Transition program currently provides IL training to high schoolers with disabilities. Curriculum addresses communication strategies, career exploration,

résumé building, interviewing skills, postsecondary education processes, financial responsibility, community resources, and conflict resolution. The 16-week Transition program is unique in its engagement of community members and volunteers who perform mock interviews with the students and provide hands-on training for adulthood following graduation. This community engagement also educates employers about the win-win of hiring individuals with disabilities in our community. This program's success has led to a Youth Transitions expansion initiative to include junior high and elementary schools. T.A.R.P. firmly believes early education and awareness is what will breed a new tomorrow for all individuals with disabilities in Tennessee.

Jackson Center for Independent Living

The Jackson Center for Independent Living (JCIL) was founded in 1996 and serves Madison, Crockett, Gibson, Carroll, Henderson, Chester, Hardin and Haywood counties. JCIL provides both direct services and systemic advocacy to promote Independent Living across the state.

JCIL's systemic advocacy focuses on creating more accessible and inclusive communities within which Tennesseans with disabilities can engage. JCIL does this by representing consumer interests with businesses and community leaders to address issues of accessibility and services while simultaneously encouraging people with disabilities to become self-advocates and understand their rights.

JCIL's direct services are diverse, provided across disability and lifespan, and, in some programs, expand outside their core service area. For example, JCIL's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services provide American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreting services to 22 counties in West Tennessee. These services promote empowerment and equal access to communication, community resources, services and events, in order to facilitate integration between Deaf and hearing people. In addition to interpreting, JCIL also provides referrals, advocacy, outreach, workshops, ASL classes, peer counseling, support groups, public awareness activities and technical assistance to employers and individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

For the past 5 years, JCIL has also worked with the Jackson Madison County School system to provide



Jackson Center For Independent Living Fishing Rodeo

transition services for high school students in special education. Students attend weekly classes for 6-8 week sessions at JCIL to learn about nutrition, fitness, finances, recreation, wellness and how to be involved in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process. These skills benefit students with disabilities as they complete their high school education and move on to adulthood, postsecondary education, and employment.

Physical accessibility is also a JCIL priority. The "Home Sweet Home" Accessible Housing Program provides home modifications, equipment, and related services to people with disabilities, allowing them the opportunity to live independently in their own homes. An accessible home is the first step toward independence and community inclusion for many people with disabilities, because when people can move freely in and out of their homes they can engage more with outside services such as healthcare. On a local level JCIL has also worked with the local election office to ensure poll workers are trained on accessibility measures and appropriately assisting voters with disabilities. To serve as a model of accessibility, JCIL itself is a polling place during each election - local, state and national.

"This collaboration will benefit our consumers by increasing our awareness of the services available and allowing us to help them find the resources they need." - JCIL



MCIL launched the ADA Legacy Team to honor their former director Deborah Cunningham.

Memphis Center for Independent Living

The Memphis Center for Independent Living (MCIL) was established in 1985 with a deep commitment to the IL philosophy. “Nothing About Us without Us” is more than a motto to MCIL - it directly influences the provision of all MCIL’s direct services and systemic advocacy. MCIL’s service area focuses on Shelby County, but extends at times to North Mississippi and East Arkansas.

MCIL staff and board conduct systemic advocacy on issues identified by consumers and as engaged members of boards and coalitions that are working on these issues in our local community. A couple target issues being addressed statewide include monitoring and supporting efforts to expand Medicaid coverage in Tennessee and advocating with state and federal legislators to maintain and expand long-term care and home and community-based services.

“MCIL may use the DD network to help find resources, ideas and new partnerships to implement our plan for a youth peer transition group.”

The ADA Legacy Team, a new systemic initiative, began with the death of our long time leader, activist and mentor, Deborah Cunningham. This group is attempting to bring city and county leaders together to establish an action plan for the Americans with Disabilities Act, which continues Deborah’s work and honors her memory.

MCIL’s direct services include a technology lab, Braille learning classes, and Independent Living skills training. MCIL has a long history of assisting individuals with disabilities transitioning from institutions and nursing homes as well as from high school into adulthood, postsecondary education, and employment. MCIL’s peer-to-peer mentor model for transitions includes guidance for LIFE support groups and Independent Living Skills curriculum.

Another successful MCIL direct service program is the Personal Assistant Services (PAS) Program, which provides training to people who require home and community-based services about employing and managing their own support staff. The PAS program names the individuals with disabilities “Consumer Managers,” because they are in charge of all aspects of their care. Although MCIL provides the basic employment needs, the Consumer Manager has authority over who comes into their home and what work is done, thereby honoring the IL philosophy that people have a basic right to manage and control their lives.

Empower Tennessee

Empower Tennessee (formerly known as the Center for Independent Living of Middle Tennessee) was established in Nashville in 1986, and became a CIL in 1992. The culture of Empower Tennessee is one that promotes advocacy for and with the individuals served. Empower Tennessee’s goal is to equip consumers with the knowledge and skills to successfully navigate complex systems and interactions with others. Services are primarily provided in Cheatham, Davidson, Robertson, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson, and Wilson counties, though the Benefits to Work program services Middle and West Tennessee and intake and referral calls are fielded from across the state.

One area of focus is employment readiness, which is promoted through résumé writing and interview preparation, as well as benefits analysis for individuals concerned about employment affecting their benefits through the Social Security Administration (SSA). The provision of assistive technology training (particularly with laptops, tablets, and smartphones) also enhances employment, educational, communication, and entertainment opportunities for Empower Tennessee’s consumers.



Empower TN: Independent Living Specialist Facilitating Peer Support Groups for Community-Based Transition Program

“Collaboration with the DD Network, which is highly organized, well-funded, and broadly connected within the community, will provide our CIL and our statewide network with the exposure of mission and services that has been lacking across our state. I believe it will also provide opportunities for joint projects and initiatives that will demonstrate a strong partnership in achieving, what is essentially, shared goals.” – Empower TN

Building on these employment readiness efforts are the Ticket to Work program (a partnership with SSA) and the Benefits to Work program. Through Ticket to Work, people with disabilities receiving SSA benefits who wish to transition to work receive support to obtain and maintain gainful employment. The Benefits to Work program also serves SSA beneficiaries by providing expert counsel on using the work incentives provided by Social Security to work while also retaining their essential healthcare and financial benefits. Over the past five years this project has helped almost two thousand beneficiaries to save thousands of dollars in potential overpayments and penalties to SSA. This program has also made a systemic impact through targeted outreach

and education to local employers explaining the benefits of employing people with disabilities.

Additionally, Empower Tennessee facilitates peer support groups to expand self-advocacy skills and ease youth transitions. These biweekly cross-disability peer groups take place with adult Urban Housing Solutions residents to enhance their advocacy skills and with students in the Metro Schools Community-Based Transition Program to enhance social and emotional skills. Youth transitions and independent community living are also the focus of a developing collaborative program with Nashville IDD Housing Group.

disABILITY Resource Center

The disABILITY Resource Center (dRC) was established in Knoxville in 1996 to serve Knox County residents. dRC’s Individual Advocacy Services assist people with disabilities in obtaining necessary support services from the community. dRC advocates work to create systemic changes towards a better more inclusive Knoxville and one-on-one with consumers to increase their independence. IL services may include assisting someone in advocating for housing, employment, and financial benefits such as Social Security and health insurance.

dRC also assists with transition services. For individuals wanting to transition from nursing homes into



disABILITY Resource Center Live Out Loud Academy

community-based settings, as well as keeping individuals with disabilities in their homes, dRC's home and community-based services program CareWorks assists consumers in their homes with cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, bathing, and other daily living activities. dRC works with CHOICES Bluecare and AmeriChoice to offer this program.

“We believe that the DD Network could prove most beneficial to the IL centers by referring consumers to our home and community-based service programs. We may also assist each other in advocacy action as well as with grant applications, and the DD Network could sponsor projects at each of the centers.” - dRC

For youth with disabilities transitioning into adulthood, dRC facilitates the development of Independent Living plans and offers the LifeABILITY Academy Summer program. The Academy provides training related to money management, finding housing, employment skills, postsecondary education, transportation, peer supports,

and, in general, “living well with a disability.” One particularly exciting program feature is the internships with collaborating businesses where students gain hands-on employment skills.

One recent systemic advocacy initiative that had a big impact was dRC's Be Street Smart Campaign. Due to a car accident involving one of our Board members who has a visual disability a safety campaign was initiated in collaboration with the Be Street Smart Campaign in D.C. and Maryland, and with funding from the City of Knoxville. The campaign provided information on safe pedestrian, bus rider, cyclist, and driver behavior in a PSA on television and at an awareness walk in downtown Knoxville kicked off by the Mayor.

dRC also held the first Be a Friend Festival (BFF) in October 2016. This festival aimed to raise awareness about bullying and those who affected by it, including people with disabilities and the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender community. The event included youth, families, educators, service providers, local businesses and other community members offering fun activities addressing bullying. Festivities included arts and crafts, dancing, and other cultural experiences.



Council on Developmental Disabilities shares information about TN's "Supporting Families Community of Practice"

Tri-State Resource and Advocacy Corp

Tri-State Resource and Advocacy Corp (TRAC) was established in 1987 to serve Bledsoe, Bradley, Grundy, Hamilton, Marion, McMinn, Meigs, Polk, Rhea, and Sequatchie counties. TRAC programs provide direct IL services and systemic change advocacy.

Deeply committed to the peer-to-peer model, TRAC's direct services include self-empowerment and self-advocacy trainings, job readiness training, and support groups. Transition services focused on moving individuals with disabilities from nursing homes to the community are enhanced by TRAC's other programs providing emergency food and building ramps for wheelchair users.

"Networking and collaboration seem to be the key to fully serving all consumers in the best possible way." - TRAC

Systemic advocacy has included outreach and collaboration to enhance independent living opportunities and facilitate postsecondary transitions for youth with disabilities in Chattanooga and TRAC's surrounding services area. Another ongoing systemic advocacy priority is ensuring accessible parking options in our communities.

Developmental Disabilities Network

Developmental Disabilities Act

The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (commonly referred to as "the DD Act") originated from legislation signed by President John F. Kennedy in 1963. The DD Act has evolved over time to reflect current research and best practice, and is based on principles of self-determination, independence, productivity, integration and inclusion in all facets of community life for individuals with developmental disabilities.

The DD Act opens with this preamble that lays the foundation for mission and purpose of the programs that carry out the Act:

*"Congress finds that **disability is a natural part of the human experience** that does not diminish the right of individuals with developmental disabilities to **live independently**, to exert control and choice over their own lives, and to fully participate in and contribute to their communities through full integration and inclusion in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of United States society."*



2016 Council on Developmental Disabilities Executive Committee Members and Staff with Governor Haslam

The DD Act creates three programs in every state and U.S. territory: State Councils on Developmental Disabilities, Protection and Advocacy Systems, and University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service.

•State Councils on Developmental Disabilities are federally funded, self-governing agencies charged with identifying the most pressing needs of people with developmental disabilities in their state or territory. They are designed to take a “big picture” approach to create structural change with a long-term impact and to empower individuals with disabilities and families to shape the policies that affect them. Council members include individuals with disabilities and family members of people with disabilities, and representatives of State agencies who are connected with disability policy and services.

•Protection and Advocacy systems were established in every state and territory to protect the legal and human rights of individuals with developmental disabilities through legal action and advocacy. They work to inform people of their rights, investigate suspected abuse and neglect, and provide free legal representation to people with disabilities. They have broad legal authority to access records, facilities, and individuals when conducting investigations, placing them in a unique position to detect and address abuse. Protection and Advocacy systems also serve individuals with behavioral or mental health diagnoses.

•University Centers for Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) offer cross-discipline training, technical assistance, and continuing education to professionals and community members. They conduct cutting-edge research, public policy analysis and broad information dissemination efforts. Many UCEDDs offer direct services to different populations of individuals with disabilities and lead model demonstration projects.

The DD Act guides each program’s activities and promotes collaborative work on statewide issues. The DD Act programs often participate in related, complementary work and collaboration even though they have different mandates.

Tennessee’s DD Network

Tennessee’s DD Network is made up of four programs:

- Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities
- Disability Rights Tennessee
- University of Tennessee Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities
- Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

The four DD Network organizations partner with one another extensively, serving on each other’s boards and working on joint priority areas. The program directors have monthly conference calls to share information and discuss common concerns. The relationship among the DD Act programs in Tennessee has been acknowledged nationally as an exemplary model of partnership. Current joint priorities include self-advocacy initiatives, transition from school to postsecondary education and employment, and engaging families from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities

The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities was established in State government by Executive Order in 1975. In 2015 the Executive Order was updated by Governor Bill Haslam, making the Council an independent agency in state government. The Council leads initiatives statewide to improve policies and practices that affect the everyday lives of Tennesseans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Council educates policymakers and the public about promising practices



2015 Disability Rights Tennessee staff

in the field of disability services, demonstrates new approaches to services and systems design, facilitates interagency collaboration and coordination, and promotes customer-focused government.

The Council is uniquely able to facilitate initiatives system-wide such as:

- Coordinating initiatives across State government agencies
- Engaging private citizens in translating needs into recommendations for program and policy changes in State services
- Monitoring best policies and practices in the disability field
- Piloting sustainable demonstration projects

“The collaboration of the Independent Living and Developmental Disabilities Act networks has enormous potential to increase the impact of our individual programs. We are all concerned with the same issues and barriers facing Tennesseans with disabilities. Just imagine what we can accomplish together!” – CDD

The Council conducts a comprehensive review and analysis of State disability services and uses this information to set goals for making support services more accessible, effective, and efficient.

Current priority initiatives of the Council include:

- A Disability Leadership Academy for executive State employees who administer disability programs (“Leadership Academy for Excellence in Disability Services,” in partnership with the TN Department of Human Resources)
- Convening and facilitating an Employment Roundtable of State agencies to improve communication and coordination of programs for youth with disabilities
- Functioning as a joint recipient of a national grant to improve supports to families, including families who don’t receive formal services to support their family member with a disability
- Conducting the Partners in Policymaking leadership training program, which continues to receive more applications than can be accepted into the program, and to date has over 500 graduates

The Council works with public and private groups to find innovative strategies that address systemic issues and increase access to public education,



Disability Rights TN client Brayden and his service animal, Luke.

employment, housing, health care, and all other aspects of community life. The Council has implemented systems change initiatives in home ownership for people with developmental disabilities, a community housing “visitation” program, Project SEARCH implementation (national model for community internships for students and adults with disabilities), inclusive child care programs across Tennessee and person-centered organizations and systems initiatives.

Disability Rights Tennessee

Disability Rights Tennessee (formerly known as Disability Law & Advocacy Center) was founded in 1978. Disability Rights Tennessee (DRT) is a nonprofit legal services organization, designated as the federal Protection & Advocacy (P&A) System for Tennessee. DRT’s mission is to protect the rights of Tennesseans with disabilities. Since its inception, legal representation and advocacy services have been provided at no cost to more than 40,000 individuals experiencing issues ranging from students with disabilities being locked in school closets to people who are deaf being denied sign language interpreters while in the hospital.

DRT has offices in Nashville, Memphis and Knoxville, but serves clients across the entire state. DRT’s work concentrates in three strategic areas: freedom from harm, freedom from discrimination, and freedom to participate in the community.

Some of the issues DRT addresses under these areas include:

- Abuse and neglect in institutions and community settings
- Ensuring students with disabilities have access to a free appropriate public school education
- Removing barriers to employment by increasing access to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services
- Eliminating discriminatory policies and practices, particularly communication barriers in health care settings
- Increasing home- and community-based services through systemic collaborations and public policy work

Since 2002, DRT has collaborated with the Secretary of State Division of Elections to ensure that Tennessee’s



Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities Leadership

election process is fully accessible to voters with disabilities. This includes educating both Tennesseans with disabilities about their legal right to fully participate in the election process and county election officials about how to meet the needs of voters with disabilities.

“Collaborating with the Independent Living Network will allow DRT an opportunity to identify any potential gaps and/or duplications in service for Tennesseans with disabilities. Working with the CIL network will further inform DRT regarding where our areas of work should focus. Additionally, there may be opportunities for DRT to work directly with the CIL network on educating policymakers in order to protect the rights of Tennesseans with disabilities.” - DRT

DRT’s Employment Advocacy Services help people with disabilities obtain, maintain and regain integrated and competitive employment. Through this program, DRT

helps individuals navigate employment services received through Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Centers for Independent Living, Ticket to Work, and other Employment First initiatives in the state. DRT answers questions about legal rights, provides legal advocacy to resolve problems in the provision of services, and supports people in requesting reasonable accommodations at work.

In partnership with DD Network members and other disability organizations, DRT educates and informs policymakers about issues that impact people with disabilities. DRT tracks and shares information during the legislative session about bills that could potentially affect individuals with disabilities.

University of Tennessee Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities

The Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities was first established in 1957 by the University of Tennessee as the Clinic for Mentally Retarded Children and was located at LeBonheur Children’s Hospital. In 1966, the Center became one of the nation’s original recipients of a training grant from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, changing its mission from solely



Photo courtesy of TennesseeWorks/Vanderbilt Kennedy Center



Photo courtesy of TennesseeWorks/Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

“The new collaboration with the CIL Network will benefit the Boling Center by creating opportunities for our faculty, staff, and trainees to become more aware and involved in broader community issues for persons with disabilities that extend beyond the scope of our training clinics, classrooms, and research projects. The CIL Network can be a great resource for the Boling Center.” - BCDD

the provision of clinical services to developing leaders in the field of developmental disabilities through interdisciplinary training in the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) program. In 1970, the Center moved into its current stand-alone building on the campus of the UT Health Science Center in Memphis. The Boling Center has been a UCEDD continuously for over 40 years, making it one of the largest and oldest in the United States.

Boling Center faculty have clinical and professional experience in training graduate students from twelve academic disciplines and possess a strong commitment to mentoring the next generation of healthcare professionals to work with people with disabilities and their families. Some recent highlights within the clinical training program include:

- LUCES is a Latino Parent Support Group that meets regularly with support from Boling Center staff in collaboration with the Autism Resources of the Mid-South (ARMS), Latino Memphis, Memphis Center for Independent Living, and Support and Training for Exceptional Parents (STEP-TN). In 2015, LUCES held two public forums and obtained valuable data, identifying families' concerns and needs.
- In July 2014, the Boling Center had the first self-advocate trainee who participated in interdisciplinary clinical, didactic, and community activities. The self-advocate approached Center staff, wanting an opportunity to learn more about other disabilities and develop leadership skills in order to expand his experience and knowledge. Plans are to build upon this success with a Self-Advocacy trainee position in the next grant cycle.
- In partnership with the Tennessee Department of Children's Services, the Boling Center's Shelby County Relative Caregiver Program (SCRCP) has entered its fifteenth year of operation and welcomes new referrals. It is the oldest and largest program of its kind in the state. Since inception, SCRCP has served over 6,000 families and 8,500 children, many of whom have developmental disabilities. Ninety-six percent of families graduating from the program have



Vanderbilt Kennedy Center: The TennesseeWorks Partnership promotes employment for people with disabilities

reported an increase in family stability by utilizing the Relative Caregiver Program's comprehensive network of support and services. Less than 5% of children have been placed in foster care. Other trainee involvement in this program includes participation in support groups, home visits, case management, and referral services.

Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC) was established in 1965 as one of the nation's 12 original national Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Centers. It was founded as the John F. Kennedy Center for Research on Education at Human Development at Peabody College, now part of Vanderbilt University. The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence on Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) was founded in 2005. It is one of four major VKC components, which also include the Vanderbilt Consortium Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) Training and the Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD).

The VKC UCEDD has over 40 programs within four areas of emphasis: education and early intervention, employment, health and mental health, and quality of life. In addition to disseminating evidence-based practices



Disability Mentoring Day at Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

to individuals with disabilities, families, educators, and service providers, the UCEDD disseminates information to legislators in order to promote public policy to improve service systems. VKC provides training for individuals with disabilities, family members, students, educators, health care professionals, and other service providers across many of its programs.

"The CIL Network empowers individuals with disabilities to advocate for themselves and for others with disabilities. VKC partners with Tennessee Allies in Self-Advocacy (TASA), a statewide network of individuals with disabilities and agencies committed to strengthening and enhancing self-advocacy among people with disabilities." – Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

The VKC UCEDD leads the TennesseeWorks Partnership, a collaborative statewide effort to change state systems to increase employment of people with disabilities. In addition to parent support organizations, disability nonprofits, and employment-related agencies, partners include six State of Tennessee departments and agencies. Community Conversations were conducted across



2016 Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Staff

Tennessee to engage stakeholders in identifying problems and solutions in their communities. Dissemination includes a comprehensive website (www.tennesseeworks.org), which includes success stories, videos, resources, events, a blog and a newsletter.

In collaboration with the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, the VKC UCEDD established Next Steps at Vanderbilt, Tennessee's first postsecondary education program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. With partners in the Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Network, we are members of the Tennessee Inclusive Higher Education Alliance, which has been instrumental in the establishment of programs at other Tennessee universities.

The VKC UCEDD, in partnership with the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD), created Health Care for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: Toolkit for Primary Care Providers (www.idd.toolkit.org). In 2016, the VKC UCEDD is evaluating the impact of telehealth training for primary care providers of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Partners on this project include the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, and the Boling Center UCEDD and LEND. The Tennessee Academy of Family Physicians, The Arc Tennessee, TennCare, and the Vanderbilt Health Affiliated Network will play essential roles in recruiting Tennessee providers for training and disseminating information.

Future Collaboration

During the three meetings of Tennessee's Independent Living and Developmental Disabilities Networks, collaborators had the opportunity to dig deeper into the mission, history, culture, expertise and strengths of individual programs. The Networks established a joint commitment to discovering new and innovative ways to partner, support each other's priorities, and pursue joint activities. Additionally, areas of shared focus were identified including, supporting youth with disabilities and their families in the transition from school to postsecondary education, employment and adulthood.

Since the initial gathering, the Networks are continually displaying their commitment to nurturing and developing this new partnership between the Independent Living Administration and Developmental Disabilities Act networks. Opportunities for collaboration in existing initiatives have already arisen, involvement in one another's work has expanded, and communications among collaborators has increased. Plans are also already underway to develop multiple strategies to address shared focus areas. Working together as allies is quickly becoming second nature as it is clear that we have shared values, goals, and a commitment to a future where people with disabilities live as integrated, empowered, independent, and productive leaders in the mainstream of American society.

Tennessee's Independent Living & Developmental Disabilities Networks



This publication is dedicated to the memory of Jamie Kendall, former Acting Director of the Independent Living Administration, who passed away in November 2015.



Council on
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